



Defining Afriphobia

AFRICAN
DIASPORA
POLITICAL
ACTION
COMMITTEE

AFRIPHOBIA

Defining Afriphobia

Afriphobia is prejudice, discrimination, fear, hatred, or bigotry towards people of African Heritage and things African.

Racism is defined by the Oxford Living Dictionary as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior. The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.

Subdividing Racism and excluding Afriphobia which underpinned enslavement and trafficking of Africans for 500 years is a way of minimising prejudice faced by some and elevating others. Fighting discrimination against people of African Heritage was at the heart of the Civil Rights movement and to exclude Afriphobia is to make Africans invisible when Racism affects them significantly. Where Racism is being further defined then it is important to say Afriphobia, Antisemitism, Antigypsism, Islamophobia.

Examples of Afriphobia

- (1) Your name is too hard to pronounce, can I just call you Mary or can I just call you John?" Disrespecting a person's name because it is too African and so "abnormal" and thinking it is acceptable to not bother to learn to pronounce the name correctly.***
- (2) Your name is too long, can I just shorten it to.....? a variation of the disrespect in***
- (3) Using Natural as description for tights and stockings implies that other skin tones are unnatural***
- (4) A group of Europeans marching to a hearing or a trial re-enacts the arbitrary "trials" in the Deep South which led to lynching which Billie Holliday sings about "Strange Fruit" :
Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees***

Lyrics of Strange Fruit

Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees
Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop

Songwriters: Lewis Allan / Maurice Pearl / Dwayne P Wiggins

Strange Fruit lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc

- (5) ***How do you speak English so well? Your English sounds good compared to others from your country – assuming Africans are a non diverse entity, too unintelligent to speak English correctly and conveniently forgetting that large parts of the globe where Africans live were controlled by the British Empire and English was the language of Government. Some Africans are well educated, some are not, just like any other people***
- (6) ***What do your people think about that? – dismissing Africans as one non diverse blob, failing to acknowledge that Africans are diverse***
- (7) ***Where are you from originally? Or Where are you really from?***
- (8) ***Can I touch your hair? Or worse still invading personal space by touching a person's hair without permission***
- (9) ***Rolling eyes when an African speaks***
- (10) ***Making monkey noises when an African walks in***
- (11) ***Only offering a banana when an African is in hospital and says they are hungry***
- (12) ***Asking the question “are you making a political statement?” if an African chooses a natural hairstyle***

Context

Afriphobia, in the fullest sense, includes some strands that intersect and runs along a spectrum of Africanness. That's to say in examining Afriphobia, we must simultaneously consider speech, hair and the physical characteristics of being African. Nevertheless, we can say in the simplest of terms that Afriphobia refers to the condition of being or feeling anti-African.

The definition of African People and People of African descent includes People of African descent via post enslavement diaspora; it also includes people of mixed heritage who have African ancestry i.e all black people of African descent.

Afriphobia is a way of identifying a misrepresentation, prejudice and discrimination that is directed to all black people of African descent. This includes the continual criminalisation of the black man and youths, persistent sexualisation of the black woman. Remnant ideas that were left over from the plantocracy efforts to justify slavery i.e. laziness, sexual promiscuity. The comprehensive whitewashing of history that has denied excluded or deliberately hidden the African contribution to world humanity and development. The remnants of racial superiority ideologies promoted in the 19th century. The lack of response to complaints of racial discrimination.

Ethnicity

There is only one Race, the Human Race and the practice of talking about race is itself problematic. There are different ethnicities, differences that can be observed in terms of complexion and culture. In terms of ethnicity, Afriphobia refers to prejudice expressed as a result of complexion and features. On a gradual scale, the Afriphobic approach is to see the Caucasian-European as the ideal the Negroid-African as the less desirable. By Negroid-African one might refer to generous lips, flatter noses, more open nostrils and our more rounded physical structure which have been mocked in cartoons yet are sought through plastic surgery. It is as if African features are only acceptable when seen on non Africans.

The darker complexion we have with these characteristics, the more likely we are to face Afriphobia. If we have a darker complexion with narrow features tending to favour European, we might face less Afriphobic experiences. If our African features are emphasised with a lighter skin complexion, we may also face less Afriphobia. Shadism is a form of racism which has harmful consequences such as the use of cancer inducing bleaching creams in an attempt to achieve the 'right' complexion.

Nevertheless, this is not in any way, an attempt to minimise the impact of Afriphobia on any particular individual. We know that whoever we are, the experience of Afriphobia is painful and disempowering with a direct impact upon us, Africans as a collective as well as, individually.

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Hair

We make a distinction between Afriphobia and afro-phobia because 'afro' as an emphasis, is associated with afro hair and thereby lessens the more serious and complex idea of Afriphobia. Thus, we outright reject afro-phobia. Afriphobia provides a link to the African Continent, an important link in terms of identity and belonging. Afriphobia has had a long and undistinguished history that still demands Africans to make their hair straight to conform to a western idea of beauty.

The hair industry, now a thriving global business places an inordinate pressure upon African women to wear other people's hair in order to conform. Films such as Black Panther have played an important role in addressing this, for example, there is a moment when we see in that film, a black wig ripped off her head by an African woman in her utter disgust at its pointlessness and discomfort. Nevertheless, as popular as that film has been, Afriphobia remains more powerful in the assertion that straight black wigs or natural hair straightened are the preferred value in western society.

There is a tendency to view short afro hair as child-like or even masculine on mature women. That's to say, short afro hair is not presumed to be the most elegant or feminine of styles which stands in direct contrast to that of being long and blonde. If however, an African woman with short Afro hair or indeed is bald, is eloquent in her English speech such as that



of Andi Oliver for example, she may well be 'elevated' to an entirely different social space to that with the same hair but speaking with a thick African accent. Natural African hair and African hairstyles such as braids are often considered unprofessional in corporate settings. African women have been asked if they are making a political statement if they choose a natural look.

Speech

Afriphobia through speech is to recognise the difference in treatment between Africans with Received Pronunciation in contrast to others that speak English eloquently, with an extensive vocabulary and an African accent. We recognise in the West that no matter how well an African might speak Afriphobia sees our physical appearance first and hears an African accent. That is to say, Afriphobia assumes before the person has spoken, that their English is poor and difficult to understand. This assumption limits the listener's ability to hear accurately without prejudice and objectivity because the link between their hearing skills and mental attitude towards the speaker is often not made.

Some common consequences of this are to become impatient towards listening, to interrupt the speaker, to correct the speaker and worse, to assume a lack of intelligence on the part of the speaker. Afriphobic listeners believe they are more informed so invariably press the speaker to explain in unnecessary detail, not for clarity but to affirm that superior belief in themselves. Afriphobic listeners are likely to become annoyed and frustrated when they have been unable to achieve that goal with an instinct to undermine the value of the information given, or even to steal it, rather than face the possibility that they do not know more than the African imparting that knowledge.

Physical Characteristics

Quite distinct from racial complexion, speech and hair, Afriphobia is expressed in a reaction to the physique of Africans. There seems to be a difficulty in seeing the person before some African physical characteristics. Some of these characteristics are given social meaning. The larger size of some of our African brothers, for example, is read as threatening and imposing. Afriphobia overly associates large or tall stature and dark African men as the criminal with violent potential.

Afriphobics tend to be either afraid of the physical presence of Africans or, conversely, occupy an obsessive fascination with the African body. This may lead to Afriphobics over sexualising African men and women, forming false beliefs about parts of their anatomy. Afriphobics often make assumptions about the 'natural' athleticism and rhythm of the African body. Afriphobics believe they know what a 'real' African is.

Organisations and Activists from the list below had input in the definition :

Africans for Jeremy Corbyn Values (formerly Africans for Momentum)
BTWSC/ African Histories Revisited
IDPAD Coalition UK
Momentum Black ConneXions (MBC)
RE:IMI (Race Equality: In Music industry)
The African or Black Question (TAOBQ)
The African SANG (founding members from Somalia, Angola, Nigeria & Ghana)
Save The Woman
Salifu Dagarti Foundation
Cheryl McLeod
Dean Okai Snr
Lucie Scott
Momodou Sanyang
Patrick Kargbo
Richard Ladokun
Shakira Martin

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